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**FEATURES OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN  
TEENAGERS INCLINED TO VICTIM BEHAVIOR**

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*Abstract*

The paper investigates issues of teenagers' victim behavior and provides results of empirical study of interpersonal relationships in teenagers inclined to victim behavior. 77 teenagers participated in the study; 40 of them displayed victim behavior. Obtained results testify that teenagers with an internal locus of control build up interpersonal relationships positively, feel confident, do not display aggression, keep their actions and words under control but do not always demonstrate openness and sincerity to partners in all fields of activity. The person exposed to negative experience of communication faces the need to be very cautious in dealing with people. Victim teenagers with an external level of subjective control show inability to cope with themselves in situations of interaction; negative attitude to the partner testifies to the complexity of establishment of harmonious relationships with friends, tendency to draw unjustified negative conclusions about others. Understanding and consideration of these features allows determining the strategy of support to prevent risks of behavior violation.

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**Keywords:** Interpersonal communication, victim behavior, adolescence, level of subjective control.



## 1. Introduction

An important factor that significantly impacts teenager's development is their desire to communicate and interact with peers; its highest point is at the period between 14-16 years. Expanding the circle of their communication, teenagers receive necessary knowledge about life that due to different reasons cannot be given by adults. Teenagers can perform different social roles when they communicate with people important for them in adolescent environment. At the same time, norms and rules adopted in the circle of peers become psychologically more important for a teenager than those available for adults (Emelyanov, 2008). The meaning of personal contacts and interests develops in interpersonal relations. In the course of communicating with peers, teenagers assert themselves acquiring subjective life experience, and in case of adverse conditions it can lead to various forms of troubled behavior, including victim behavior (Bochkaryova, 1972). Adolescence is the very period when a teenager has to withdraw from custody. Significant relationships with people of the opposite gender and status in the peer group are crucial. This is the period when adolescents may find themselves in dangerous situations that lead to the formation of victimization. Many researchers attribute this troubled behavior to the following negative factors that disrupt the process of socialization: dissatisfaction with social needs and availability of such personality traits that impact the choice of social means and ways to meet needs (Boivin, Petitclerc, Feng, & Barker, 2010). They include low self-esteem, the level of subjective control, lack of support from the community, significant anxiety and frustration (Dolgovykh, 2009). Adolescence is the factor that increases the degree of victim vulnerability though the type of victim behavior is largely determined by individual psychological factors (risk-taking, anxiety, unstable self-esteem, radicalism and suspicion), psychophysiological peculiarities (gender differentiation) and individual experience (parents' aggressive behavior) (Matusevich, & Kubyshko, 2014). Focus on personal factors leading to the emergence of victimization will help to understand what preventive measures should be developed to define behavior strategies that will serve as resources in peers' interpersonal relationships.

## 2. Problem Statement

Adolescence is a critical period of development for personal identity and autonomy formation; increasingly teenagers rely more on peers to assess their behavior and social competence than on their parents. The success with which adolescents can orient in their peers' environment, ability to form and maintain positive partner and romantic relationships, depend on the level of subjective control of emotional well-being (Pellegrini, & Long, 2003). Adolescence is the phase of development when a teenager is most vulnerable from the point of view of others' opinions and inclined to use inefficient strategies to get peer' social approval and compete for the attention of potential romantic partners. (Griese, Buhs, & Lester, 2016).

Ways of teenagers' victimization are closely related to changes in the social context and interpersonal relationships development. Issues of victim behavior were considered at preschool age (Boivin et al., 2010), though most studies show that propensity to victim behavior manifests itself in adolescence (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000). The research conducted by Boivin et al. (2010) is devoted to the study of influences between variants of teenagers' victimization and social emotional difficulties (aggression, emotional vulnerability). Haltigan and Vaillancourt (2014) used the modelling

method to propose four trajectories of teenagers' victimization; they reflected the relationship between behavioral disorders frequency and the degree of personality victimization.

Leontiev (1999) singles out the violation of the meaning of human life regulation as the main psychological cause of victim behavior. A person with a developed meaningful regulation is able to handle their actions and subject them to stable non-situational factors. A powerful resource of formed meaningful regulation is a developed level of subjective control, a high level of personal tolerance, constructive and reasonable methods to manage stress and conflicts. A high level of personal anxiety in adolescents which can cause severe neuroticism and become a pretext for victimization testifies to inconsistency or violations in the sphere of personality's meaningful regulation (Labunskaya, 1999). Adolescents with successful social adaptation are less prone to stress and conflicts in interpersonal relationships, therefore, it is less likely that they will be chosen as victims by their peers (Coleman, & Byrd, 2003). On the other hand, adolescents unsuccessful in social adaptation are at risk to become a victim. A high level of victimization, in turn, indicates ineffective strategies in resolving conflicts between peers (Kochenderfer-Ladd, & Skinner, 2002). For example, Rosen et al. (2009) found that children exhibiting inattentive and hyperactive behavior are more likely to be harassed by their peers, perhaps because their impulsive behavior irritates aggressors, making them easy targets. Leonova (2017) ascertains that teenagers' self-confidence can be regarded as a resource to form their independent and truly subjective position in life. A low level of self-confidence in teenagers increases the probability of becoming a victim in different social situations that provoke or facilitate criminal behavior towards them.

Family factors, including parental warmth and parental hostility, strategies of family upbringing (especially that of a father) are also significant factors that manifest inclination for victimization in adolescence. A number of studies have shown that trustful relationships in the family positively impact children's and teenagers' prosocial behavior (Deater-Deckard, Dunn, O'Connor, Davies, & Golding, 2001; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). On the other hand, directive style and inconsistency in upbringing conducted by father aggravated by his constant supervision, lack of the sense of social support and inclusion in society, negative social and psychological climate in the family, pressure of some of its members influence the formation of child's personality, self-esteem and perception of oneself as a victim. Victimization thus formed is manifested in victimogenic behavior (Arakelyan, & Shaboltas, 2015)

Disharmonious relationships with teachers, failure to master educational programs, teenager's social status and interpersonal relationships with peers in class can determine victim behavior (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). Studies testify that teenagers with high rates of victim behavior are socially isolated, excluded from group interactions. However, such rejection is based primarily on the feeling of hostility on the part of peers; it can arise due to a variety of reasons different from behavior focused on exclusion (Lopez, & DuBois, 2005). Apart from influencing social and psychological adaptation, it was found that victimization adversely affects academic achievements (Erath, Flanagan, & Bierman, 2008). This statement is confirmed by research data in case when victimization is associated with high absenteeism (Nishina, & Juvonen, 2005) and decrease in academic achievements (Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Tobin, 2005). External characteristics, including facial attractiveness can become one of the factors that are associated with victimization and open reluctance of peers to interact. Rosen, Underwood & Beron (2011) conducted the study which revealed that less attractive teenagers became victims of their peers more often. It is assumed that high social competency can help protect less attractive children from

experiencing victimization, while a low social competency can serve as a risk factor for victimization even for the most attractive child. Prosocial behavior significantly reduces the link between peer victimization and loneliness by controlling levels of received peer support (Griese, & Buhs, 2014).

Friends, especially those who will help to protect from peer aggression, reduce chances of victimization and decrease negative consequences of victimization (Erath et al., 2008; Schmidt, & Bagwell, 2007). Thus, peer support acts as an important indicator that mitigates the risk of children's victimization. Junger-Tas, van Kesteren & Krens (1999) found out that only 11% of children who have five or more friends become victims at school, but 51% of children, victims of peer aggression, say they do not have friends. The necessity to protect from peer victimization is less significant in the group of girls. (D'Esposito, Blake, & Riccio, 2011).

Students with disabilities experience a much higher risk of victim behavior than schoolchildren without disabilities. Students with disabilities identify themselves as victims and not as violators more often (Rose et al., 2011; Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, & Frerichs, 2012). Friendship and inclusion in a broad social context of peer interaction as well as peer social support hinder victimization (Demaray, & Malecki, 2003). Nevertheless, schoolchildren with disabilities have fewer friendships than peers without restrictions; they contract increased victimization due to peer rejection, low status and prestige. This does not concern all students with disabilities, but more often those with physical disorders or disorders of autistic spectrum (Lindsay, & McPherson, 2012). They are limited in contacts with classmates after classes and are not integrated into peer activities in class (Farmer, Wike, Alexander, Rodkin, & Mehtaji, 2015).

The majority of analyzed researches study consequences of victimization in teenagers; some researches examine factors of victimization in adolescents including teenagers with disabilities; other researches reveal personal characteristics of teenagers with victim behavior and specify significant difficulties in interpersonal communication construction; but there is insufficient information about the nature of interpersonal relationships among teenagers prone to victim behavior.

### **3. Research Questions**

The main issue covered in this study is the evaluation of interpersonal relations of teenagers inclined to victim behavior with different levels of subjective control to expand our understanding of age-specific characteristics manifested in victim personality, mechanisms and strategies for resolving conflict situations in the reference group. Obtained empirical data will further be used to elaborate programs aimed to prevent victimization in teenagers prone to various types of victim behavior in conditions that promote personality potential development.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this paper is to propose a psychological analysis of victim phenomenon in teenagers' personality and to study features of teenagers' interpersonal communication inclined to victim behavior with different levels of subjective control.

## 5. Research Methods

Methods of theoretical analysis were applied in the work. Testing was conducted according to the following psycho-diagnostic methods:

- test-questionnaire ‘Methodology for diagnosing propensity to victimized behavior’ by Andronnikova (2005) as a standardized questionnaire to assess teenagers’ propensity to manifest forms of victim behavior; it comprises a set of specialized psycho-diagnostic scales;
- methodology for diagnosing the level of subjective control by Rotter (adapted by Bazhina, Golyunkina, & Etkind, 1984) assesses the vector of subjective control over various circumstances, establishes the level of personality responsibility for actions and life – external (external locus) and internal (inner locus);
- methodology for diagnosing self-monitoring assessment in communication by Snyder (1974) reveals the level of control while communicating with other people as one of the main components of communicative skills associated with the student’s personality socialization;
- methodology ‘Assessment of destructive settings in interpersonal relations’ by Boyko (1996) divulges open and hidden cruelty to surrounding people, tendency to groundless generalization of negative facts, as well as reasoned negativity in interpersonal interaction.

School students aged between 14-15 years of the Republic of Tatarstan (Russia) were recruited for the research. 77 respondents made up the general sample. Introductory talk preceded the research; participants got acquainted with research objectives, techniques and procedures of their performance; besides they were informed about the importance of the research and issues considered in it. Quantitative and qualitative mathematical analyses of obtained data were done using SPSS v.17.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Propensity to victim behavior of teenagers in the general sample

PDB methodology did not reveal inclination to victim behavior in 48% of teenagers (37 school students). 52% of research participants (40 school students) had the level above norm which can be considered as a tendency to victimization of behavior (VB). Analysis of average group results in the sample of teenagers with VB (n = 40) according to the method of scales specified that social desirability of answers is higher than the norm in 12.5% of participants (5 school students); it identifies teenagers’ alertness to the psycho-diagnostic situation. High results are revealed on the scales of propensity to aggressive behavior, propensity to self-damaging behavior and hyper-social behavior. These results suggest that teenagers tend to deliberately create conflict situations, violate established rules, norms and values. It was revealed that adolescents prone to victimized behavior have not realized victimization but there is inner readiness for the victim's mode of behavior (the scale ‘Realized Victimization’). Table 1 provides the results.

**Table 01.** Analysis of propensities to victim behavior in teenagers

Scales/criteria	Below norm		Norm		Above norm	
	Number of persons	%	Number of persons	%	Number of persons	%
Social desirability of answers	10	25	25	62,5	5	12,5
Aggressive behavior	3	7,5	11	27,5	26	65
Propensity to self-damaging and self-destructive behavior	1	2,5	8	20	31	77,5
Propensity to hyper-social behavior	4	10	5	12,5	31	77,5
Propensity to dependent and helpless behavior	9	22,5	25	62,5	6	15
Propensity to non-critical behavior	8	20	27	67,5	5	12,5
Realized victimity	-	-	-	-	40	100

## 6.2. The level of subjective control in teenagers with victim behavior

Research results show that teenagers prone to victim behavior with a high level of subjective control (12.5%) are characterized as people inclined to take responsibility for everything. In interpersonal communication, teenagers tend to form their own circle of communication and choose their partners. However, behavior peculiarities in these teenagers suggest that interpersonal relationships among them are more complex. Due to their straightforwardness and aggressiveness, they lose sympathy and attractiveness. Communication partners disengage from them; the circle of communication is getting narrower.

Teenagers prone to victim behavior with a low level of subjective control (87.5%) are characterized as people who are not inclined to take responsibility. They do not show initiative in communication, they are not inclined to form a circle of their communication and choose their partners. No matter how successful or unsuccessful their interpersonal relationships are, teenagers are used to considering their partners active. Moreover, their communication is difficult due to the prevalence of the external type for all indicators as these teenagers do not want to conform and be flexible with their partner in communication. Table 2 presents the results.

**Table 02.** The level of subjective control in teenagers prone to victim behavior

Scales	High LSC		Low LSC	
	Number of persons	%	Number of persons	%
General internality	5	12,5	35	87,5
Internality in the field of achievements	16	40	24	60
Internality in the field of failures	8	20	32	80
Internality in the field of family relations	16	40	24	60
Internality in the field of labor and service relations	5	12,5	35	87,5
Internality in the field of interpersonal relations	20	50	20	50
Internality in relation to health and disease	14	35	26	65

Table 2 shows that a large percentage of victim teens have an external type of control locus. These teenagers are characterized by anxious and depressed state; they care less about themselves and their health than teenagers of the internal type. They are more susceptible to various psychological problems LSC due to the

tendency to attribute responsibility to external forces. Teenagers with a high LSC are more active in extracting information, and are more informed than teenagers with a low LSC. They are characterized by popularity in interpersonal relationships; they are more tolerant and self-confident.

### **6.3. The study of the communicative control level in teenagers prone to victim behavior**

The group of teenagers prone to victim behavior has a low level of self-monitoring in communication, 57.5% (23 school students). It testifies that teenagers are stable in their behavior; they do not think that it is necessary to change due to circumstances. They are capable for open communication, that's why they are considered "uncomfortable" because of their straightforwardness. 35% (14 school students) of respondents showed an average level of self-control that characterizes them as short-tempered when they display their emotional reactions. High results of self-monitoring in communication were revealed in 7.5% (3 school students) of teenagers prone to victim behavior.

### **6.4. Assessment of destructive settings in interpersonal relationships.**

Victim teenagers with a high level of subjective control are active in communication; they can easily begin a conversation and be a leader in it. However, such manifestation in communication of teenagers with victim behavior is characteristic only in the already formed circle of communication.

### **6.5. Study of interpersonal relations of victimized teenagers at different levels of subjective control**

In the group of teenagers prone to victim behavior with an internal level of subjective control, the following links are peculiar ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

The scale of general internality is interconnected with communicative control ( $r = 1.378$ ), with reasoned negativism in situations of interaction ( $r = -12,236$ ), with communicative control in the situation of interaction ( $r = 2.536$ ), that evidences of the desire to control their own behavior and words while conversing, the ability to control their emotions; teenagers do not display expressed aggression towards others; they are directly involved in communication and try to control speech utterance; there is no hidden aggression towards partners in communication; teenagers are not inclined to unreasonable accusations of partners.

The scale of internality in the sphere of family relationships has a positive link with high communicative control ( $r = 2,536$ ) that displays sociability and openness with parents though their relations in family life are emotionally meager and restrained; teenagers are not characterized by hidden hostility and aggression towards relatives ( $r = 0.732$ ), they are not inclined to draw unreasonable conclusions about close people ( $r = 0.763$ ).

The scale of internality in the sphere of labor and production relations is interrelated with high communicative control ( $r = 1.378$ ), negative communication experience ( $r = 1.432$ ), and negativism ( $r = -12.236$ ). Teenagers control their behavior in communication with teachers and educators, find common language with classmates, do not refuse to help them, but there are unpleasant partners for joint activities who they avoid.

The internality scale in the field of interpersonal relationships has a correlation with such indicators as high communicative control ( $r = 1.378$ ), negative communication experience ( $r = 1.432$ ) and negativity

( $r = -12.236$ ). The results show that these teenagers control their behavior in interrelation. It is not difficult for them to adapt to changing situations in communication. They are not inclined to aggression and cruelty towards partners. Their behavior in communication is flexible and convenient for partners.

The scale of internality in the field of attitude to health and illness positively correlates with communicative control ( $r = 2.536$ ) and negatively with grumbling ( $r = -0.763$ ). Teenagers are able to correlate their reactions to surrounding people's behavior; they are not inclined to make unreasonably negative conclusions about people without valid reasons; they communicate openly but are restrained to manifest emotions.

The group of teenagers prone to victim behavior with an external level of subjective control demonstrates the following links ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

The scale of general internality is positively associated with low communicative control ( $r = 0.32$ ) and inverse dependence with reasoned negativism ( $r = -12,236$ ). Teenagers are impulsive in their behavior and communication and do not have a large circle of acquaintances; there is no inclination to demonstrate open brutality or express obvious aggression towards others.

The scale of internality in the field of achievements is connected with veiled brutality ( $r = 0.732$ ), grumbling ( $r = 0.763$ ) and communicative control ( $r = -2.536$ ). It can be assumed that hidden anger and resentment towards others in teenagers appears due to feelings of dissatisfaction that arises when all their achievements are attributed to other people; there is a negative attitude toward others and the lack of ability to establish contacts, even for their own successes in future.

The scale of internality in the field of failures is linked to indicators of veiled cruelty ( $r = 0.732$ ), grumbling ( $r = 0.763$ ) and communicative control ( $r = -2.536$ ). A teenager experiences hidden dislike for people who are somehow connected with his/her failures; they tend to think of those around as blamed for all their troubles having no reasons for this; they do not know how and do not want to make acquaintances and take the initiative in communication with already available acquaintances, even in order to prevent bad events.

The scale of internality in the area of family relationships correlates with the index of veiled brutality ( $r = 0.732$ ), grumbling ( $r = 0.763$ ) and communicative control ( $r = -2.536$ ).

Victim teenagers tend to hold the grudge against their close relatives and they often accuse them of what is happening; in this case they often resort to verbal rudeness, inadequate emotional reactions.

The internality scale in the field of labor and service relationships has interrelationships with low communicative control ( $r = 0.324$ ) and open cruelty ( $r = 0.247$ ). Teenagers do not hide their dislike both for their peers and elders. They have complicated relationships with teachers at school; they receive frequent comments concerning their personality. Inability to cope with oneself at the right time and displayed negative reaction to a partner shows difficulty to build harmonious relationships with peers and high impulsiveness in communication.

The scale of internality in the field of interpersonal relations is linked to a low communication control ( $r = 0.324$ ) and open cruelty ( $r = 0.247$ ). Teenagers reveal high impulsiveness in communication; they are uninhibited in their choice of words and actions. The circle of communication is narrow, they tend to create situations that embarrass people and treat them rudely and disrespectfully. Because of this, the circle of their communication is getting narrower; peers disengage from them.

## 7. Conclusion

The following conclusions have been drawn on the basis of obtained research results of interpersonal relationships in teenagers inclined to victim behavior. In the general sample of respondents, according to the scale of realized victimhood, 53% (40 school students) of teenagers displayed results higher than a norm. They often get in unpleasant and dangerous situations, tend to deliberately create conflict situations and violate established rules, norms and values. They provoke situations of victimization with their peers. The majority of teenagers (87.5%) have an external level of subjective control, which is consistent with the results of a number of studies. Among teenagers with victimized behavior, the externals usually prevail over the internals, and their share is more than 80%. On the contrary, in other samples among young people with prosocial orientation showing a high level of social maturity for their age, the absolute majority belongs to the internals (Rivman, 1975)

The results of our study specify that teenagers prone to victim behavior with a high (internal) level of subjective control (12.5%) are characterized by a desire to take responsibility in everything. In interpersonal communication, teenagers tend to form their own circle of communication and choose their own communication partners. However, the availability of peculiarities in their behaviors indicates that interpersonal relationships among these teenagers are more complex. Teenagers prone to victimized behavior with a low (external) level of subjective control (87.5%) often escape responsibility. They do not show initiative in communication and are not motivated to form a circle of their communication; they are passive in choosing partners of communication and tend to shift responsibility for their behavior and actions to those around them. Due to their straightforwardness and aggressiveness, they lose sympathy and attractiveness. Partners in communication disengage from them; the circle of communication is getting narrower. This state of the locus of subjective control has a negative connotation since attention fixed on failures raises the level of personal anxiety and, therefore, impedes adequate comprehension of oneself and one's own actions and effective interpersonal relationships with peers.

The results of the study conducted by Espelage et al. (2002) showed a high level of connection between externality and bullying in relation to victim children. Teenagers prone to victim behavior, with an internal control locus, often reflect on unsuccessful interaction with peers and blame themselves for the incident; they feel worse than teenagers with an external control locus who seek social support after the event or think about how they could avoid such a situation in future. Analyses of such behavior can help to orient toward needs of those teenagers who consider themselves to be frequent targets of peer persecution (Nishina, & Juvonen, 2005)

Internality in interpersonal communication may be an appropriate strategy for victimized teenagers. In addition, if a child somehow provokes his/her own persecution, self-reflection can help determine behavior that hooligans consider either annoying or helpful. On the other hand, there is a risk that at high rates of the internal locus of control victimized teenagers can become lonely and anxious and may display weakness and vulnerability disapproved by the social group (Kochenderfer-Ladd, & Skinner, 2002). Nevertheless, a high level of subjective control in interpersonal contacts of victimized teenagers makes it possible to control the situation of interaction. They face fewer social problems than teenagers with an external level of subjective control who do not try to change their situation.

Thus, in order to help children avoid social victimization or cope with the experience of ineffective communication with peers, programs for prevention of victimization in teenagers prone to various types of victim behavior in conditions that promote the development of personal potential and ‘adapted’ to teenagers’ individual characteristics should be elaborated.

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